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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0045
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0078
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 1720
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0464
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0519
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2/HSE/CCJ5// PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DHO-2/REA/NMJIC-J2// PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFFWASHINGTON DC//J5/RUE// PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1715

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 001295

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN, NSC FOR DAVID MERKEL, DS/IP/SCA AND DS/DSS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/22/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [TX](#)
SUBJECT: NIYAZOV DEATH SITREP 002: 12/22/2006

REF: A. (A) ASHGABAT 1289
[1](#)B. (B) ASHGABAT 1292

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Jennifer L. Brush for reasons 1.4
(B) and (D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) During a December 22 meeting of the Emergency Action Committee, post reviewed drawdown tripwires and agreed that there was no need to consider drawdown at this time. The political situation remains stable, with governmental offices continuing to function. Funeral events will begin 9:00 am December 24; the funeral itself will take place at the Gypjak mausoleum where Niyazov's parents and siblings are buried. The Uzbekistani DCM told Charge that Karimov, who "between us has heart problems too," is no longer coming to the funeral; instead President of Parliament Halilov will attend. The situation in the capital remains quiet; all embassy Americans are accounted for and in Ashgabat, and will continue to exercise caution as they move around the city. The embassy is continuing business as usual, including a full range of consular services and has sent a warden message. There are rumors of a cash run at the foreign bank at which most citizens keep private accounts, but all other banks are open and functioning normally. We are seeing no signs of hoarding and, in fact, there seems to be plenty of bread in the state bread stores, for the first time in months. The airport remains open, though the authorities have announced that they will cease issuing visas at the airport to passengers arriving only with Letters of Introduction (visitors arriving with valid visas will still be allowed to enter the country). Parts of the border apparently are fully sealed and parts sealed to outgoing traffic. End Summary.

EAC Review of Drawdown Tripwires: None Triggered

[1](#)2. (C) Post's Emergency Action Committee (EAC) met again at [1](#)1100. The EAC discussed the tripwires listed under "Growing Potential for Drawdown" regarding the "Incapacitation, death, or removal of President Niyazov." The EAC determined that three of the tripwires had not/not been triggered:

-- Perception of U.S. responsibility in the president's demise;

-- Decrease in the effectiveness of Government of Turkmenistan security organs; and

-- Disruption of air travel out of Turkmenistan.

The EAC determined that it was too early to call the status of the the two other tripwires:

-- Conflict between government structures for control of the country and/or a power vacuum, and

-- Ascendancy into power of strongly anti-American individuals or factions.

Post will continue to conduct periodic reviews as necessary.

Political Situation: Government Institutions Functioning

13. (C) The political situation here remains stable. On December 21 the National Security Council, Cabinet of Ministers and Mejlis (Parliament) issued an announcement stating that the government would continue to promote Niyazov's foreign and domestic policies, and called on the people of Turkmenistan to be patient and courageous. Acting President Berdimuhammedov has started issuing decisions as "Interim President of Turkmenistan, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers;" these include authorization for the Halk Maslahaty (People's Council) to meet at 3:00 pm December 26,

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and a three-day lying-in-state at the Presidential Palace. The final ceremony at the palace will begin at 0900 December 24, followed by a 1200 funeral at the Gypjak mausoleum. The Uzbekistani DCM told Charge that, contrary to earlier reports, President Karimov, who "between us has heart problems too" will not attend the funeral; Parliament President Halilov will attend in his stead. The Mejlis (Parliament) of Turkmenistan met today, but none of its decisions have yet been made public.

Atmosphere: Quiet, with Business as Usual

14. (C) The situation in and around the capital remains quiet amid a heavy police presence. All embassy Americans, including a team that went out to the Iranian border yesterday for the official turnover of the Altyn Asyr checkpoint, have returned to Ashgabat; they reported that police at checkpoints outside the city were more pleasant than usual. Peace Corps volunteers will be kept in Ashgabat until after December 26. Embassy is continuing with business as usual and is maintaining full consular services, but staff are exercising caution and not going out at night. A warden message has gone out to all registered Americans in Turkmenistan; however, many have already left the country for the holidays. Many restaurants have closed for seven days. A number of non-ethnic citizens of Turkmenistan worry about their status under Berdimuhammedov or any other nationalist Turkmen president.

15. (C) All prisons have been closed to visitors. The World Bank representative here has reported a cash run at the Turkmen-Turkish bank, the bank at which many citizens keep private accounts, which is rumored to be closed today. Other state-owned banks and the Pakistan National Bank, which is where most companies keep their accounts, remain open. Unofficial dollar exchange rates are remaining largely constant. On December 21 there were longer-than-usual lines at gas stations, as citizens sought to buy gas as a hedge against possible price increases, however, gas lines were back to normal by December 22. Likewise, the markets were

unusually crowded on December 21, with people stockpiling food in the expectation that the markets would close and/or prices would be raised. The markets were open, however, on December 22 but business was slow. Two embassy staff who live close to state bread stores reported that, for the first time in months, there appeared to be plenty of bread -- including the cheap state-subsidized "bricks."

Airport Remains Open, But Cancels Airport Visa Service

¶6. (C) The airport remains open, and most flights departed on time or only somewhat late on December 21. Ref b reports that citizens of Turkmenistan would not be permitted to enter or leave Turkmenistan until after the funeral are inaccurate; embassy personnel at the international airport reported seeing many local travelers. However, MFA has called embassies to inform them that, while individuals arriving with valid visas will be permitted to enter over the coming days, Turkmenistan will suspend the practice until further notice of issuing visas at the airport to individuals who arrive with valid Letters of Introduction. Lufthansa announced that it will suspend its December 24 flight. MFA has separate visa procedures for official delegations attending the funeral.

¶7. (C) Embassy Tashkent informed embassy that parts of the Uzbekistani-Turkmenistani border were completely sealed to outgoing and incoming traffic. Embassy learned that the border crossing at Farap is open only to incoming traffic.

Press Reaction: Mostly Moderate and Non-Alarmist

¶8. (C) Turkmenistan's newspapers, all state-controlled, are focusing on extolling Niyazov, and publishing directives and

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condolence notes. Russian press has been largely constructive, moderate and focused on the need for a transition consistent with the rule of law. However, there have been some articles that have noted that Niyazov's death provided a window of opportunity which the United States might exploit in an effort to establish a foothold in Central Asia.

Future Sitreps

¶9. (U) Embassy is working on septel containing suggestions for an incentives package for the new administration, and then will focus on preparing for the funeral. The next sitrep will be no earlier than December 24, assuming the country remains calm.

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